

Western MRS Meeting
AB Tech Enka Campus
January 28, 2005

Attendees:

State Staff: Tony Troop, Joy Gossett, Ann Robinson, Steve Elledge, Rhoda Ammons, John McMann, Dan Comer, Heather Thomas, Kurt (?)

Counties: Ashe, Buncombe, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Haywood, Iredell, Jackson

Agenda:

Introduction

Division Updates (Dear County & Admin Letters)

MRS Issues: evaluation, training, legislation, consultation

Policy Questions or Issues

Breakouts by Implementation more than 6 months/ not yet or less than 6 months (*Note: did not do this in Western meeting because all counties in attendance had implemented more than 6 months.*)

Division Updates – Letters/ Policy Updates

- The following administrative or Dear County Director letters have come out:
 - Child Welfare Funding Survey
 - Administrative Letter WF 06-04 (12/15) Social Security Increase
 - DCD (12/20) Challenge for Children 2005
 - WF Manual Change notice CN12-2004 DSS 82-18
 - DCD Ch 5 Immediate Change to 1205 Foster Care payments 12-2004
 - Change to Children's Services Sec 9 Drug Affected Children (primarily meth) Protocol went out with this notice.
 - LINKS manual replacement material
 - Program monitoring 5027 sent 1/6
 - Work First Sanction Policy DCD letter 1/05
 - Practice Guidelines for Family Centered Practice are out - this was in draft form for a long time, has now been finalized. Also on MRS website.
 - Important to note that this is not new manual material and does not establish new policy. It quotes and refers to policy but it is not policy, only practice guidelines.

Direction for MRS - 4 components: Evaluation, Training, Legislation, Consultation

Evaluation

- Web-based evaluation rolling out very soon.
- Will be conducting trainings in February and March. Trainings will be train the trainer format so should carefully consider who will attend. Trainings will be in Raleigh unless a county can find a training site.

- The 42 no longer have to submit the Tracking Form, however the 10 need to continue the spreadsheet until further notice to ensure that we have data for the remainder of this year.
- Duke will be conducting in-depth evaluation including client interviews and record reviews as well as information on MRS as a whole.

Legislative

- Division is asking the General Assembly to look at all of 7B (Child Welfare) for changes in language to reflect MRS.
- What this does is opens all Child Welfare Law to review and debate by legislature.
- When General Assembly asks the Division for information, we may look to counties.

Consultation

- Primary consultation with CPRs and Work First Reps.
- Division will post a MRS policy consultant soon. This person will take over some of the duties Tony had before taking the Coordinator position. It will be a home based position lots of travel.

Training

- Calendar is out, 52 need to get their training needs for existing staff met prior to 7/1/05.
- DV training one trainer, Angela Holloway has been hired, and other is in the hiring process. Will start training after that process complete.
- Meth trainings contract almost complete. This will be a one day Division sponsored training. Trainings from SBI or other Law Enforcement Agencies will cannot be used to take the place of this training. (Keep on the lookout for further information on DV and meth trainings.)
- Note that Cornerstone 3A is the only required MRS training
- Will start offering Cornerstone I to non MRS counties March 1

Items of Discussion:

There has been feedback that the Division needs to strengthen capacity to help community partners know their role in MRS. Division would like to be able to tell community partners the implications – benefits and expectations of MRS.

- School and mental health have concerns about calling ahead and meeting with all family members together.
- Families that had previously been substantiated on and are now reporters want to know why things are different and families get a call before a SW shows up.
- Workers need to have it emphasized to them that it is still ok to talk to a child alone if necessary.
- Some school officials don't like being a collateral even if they were the reporter.
- Foster parents are also confused about their roles. (One called a biological parent in another state without the social worker's knowledge.)
- Due to the increase of children in care with mentally ill biological parents, Foster Parents have concerns about Shared Parenting.

- Watauga kidnapping: This situation came up and Tony took the opportunity to reiterate that it has ***always*** been the policy/position not to jeopardize safety for anyone, including Foster Parents. *Do not put people at risk to have a Shared Parenting meeting because you think the Division requires it.* (Note that this situation had nothing to do with MRS s Shared Parenting. The phrase was used incorrectly and later used incorrectly in the paper.)
- Buncombe felt that Shared Parenting has always been very successful have to use different levels of involvement depending on the circumstances of each case and the comfort level of the Foster Parents.
- *Shared Parenting Success Story* Cleveland The family was reunified, but the Biological and Foster parents continue their relationship to the point that the family thinks of the Foster Parent as a grandmother. They talk frequently about the child, the Biological parents ask advice, use the Foster Parent for respite care.
- Foster Parents attending Cornerstone I might want to know what DSS will do to protect their safety.
- Have to be realistic, especially in this age of technology where people can find anyone on the Net. Have to prepare people, but don't focus on the exceptions, particularly the extreme ones, but instead teach the policy and practice, noting that in each situation specific circumstances are considered from a safety perspective.
- Question arose about GAL.
- Basically, everyone (Foster Parents, GALs, and the community have the same 3 concerns:
 1. Interviewing with the child present
 2. Calling before the interview
 3. Collaterals being involved
- It should be made clear that safety always comes first and none of the above things should happen if there is a safety issue.
- Note from Tony GALs have said they would like to be invited to Child and Family Team meetings when DSS has not taken custody. However, Division has said they don't have the legislative capacity to be there.
- In one county the school (who was not the reporter) was mad at DSS because they were not at the CFT meeting, but the family didn't invite them, however most counties have problems getting schools to come even when they are the reporter, some schools try to use DSS as a threat for leverage against the family.
- In summary, community partners need to know that they will be invited to various meetings but they cannot use DSS as a weapon or a threat. Agencies will have to partner with DSS and the family, unlike before. Can't just call in a report and then be finished with it.
- County suggested that if there are some people in agencies that are community partners that are enthusiastic about MRS, they talk to others in those agencies. (Have a GAL talk to other GALs because they know where they are coming from.)

- Tony let the 42 know that as Cornerstone rolls out, counties will be asked to come and speak. The 10 have already done this, so we will look to the 42 this time.

Funding Concerns

- Spending too much TANF money because substations that were funded by IVE are down, but assessments, which are funded by TANF are up.
- Tony said that 3 of the 10 have said that MRS had a financial effect there is a Directors Work Group addressing this issue currently we don't know what they will recommend.
- Buncombe (original 10) has made the decision that although they have 45 days to make a decision, they do it in 30 so that they don't have to spend the money for the extra half of a month.
- Caldwell (original 10) takes the extra 15 days because it allows them to hook into other services so they don't keep Services Recommended cases open as long.
- Crux of the issue is that because services are being front loaded in 210, spending more TANF money, which is capped. Federal money does not cover prevention funding has not caught up with philosophy.

MRS Training Institute

- This will be used as a springboard to bring the other 48 counties in.
- Tentatively planned for the 1st or 2nd week of June
- Looking to bring in national speakers.
- If you would like to participate in the planning, let us know.

Policy Updates

- In some cases there are different findings for children in the same home if appropriate that is ok.
- 4th finding status Services Provided, Protective services no longer needed the holdup is the change to the Central Registry. This is substantial and we want to incorporate all changes at once. Unsure of the current status on this, will look into.

Where are we – how to get this information in the most effective way

- Tony will start sending out a survey to counties regarding what is happening locally so that we no longer have to go around the room and give county by county updates yet the Division can still keep up with county. Need to know status, barriers/challenges, and successes.
- Will have something on the web where counties can share stories about specific families or things that are working for them. We will try this and see how it goes.
- Possibly of a MRS newsletter

When assigning cases, other than what is in policy, for each county, is there any one criteria that causes you to automatically assign Forensic?

- Ashe DV assigned forensic
- Catawba nothing automatically assigned forensic
- Caldwell no one thing, its situational (used to take all after hours and immediate response as forensic, but not anymore)

- Jackson DV assigned forensic
- Iredell immediate response
- Haywood DV, weapons, meth (lab or using)
- Cleveland DV, weapon, child injury

How do you handle on-call? Are they done as family assessment?

- Buncombe has a 2nd shift of workers that work 12-8 and every 4th Saturday.
- Caldwell one worker on a voluntary basis assessors are on call for 30/60 days but that is their whole job for that time period (except previous cases that they had open). By not having to come in during the day they can catch up on paperwork.
- Cleveland 4 workers do 7 days on, 7 days off
- Haywood similar system to Cleveland

Switching tracks, from Forensic to Family Assessment

- This is rare, (more likely to go the other way) but how do you handle it?
- Buncombe and Caldwell staff is cross trained in their counties said each county has to figure out what method works best for their county specific situations.

Who is keeping one worker for the life of the case?

- Caldwell Keep in need of services if moderate risk, transfer if high or intensive to a high risk case manager (who is on the same team as the original worker). Team staffings.
- Ashe only 5 workers so everyone does a little bit of everything would like to be able to separate out high risk.
- Buncombe workers are separated out as just Forensic, just Assessors, and just Service providers but do team staffings.
- Catawba 1 worker for both kinds of assessments, but transfer for case management. Just got new workers and will be keeping the case.
- Jackson blended teams each of which has 1 forensic person, all others on the team do everything.

Questions/Comments for later discussion

- How is Safe Surrender handled? Forensic or Family Assessment?
- Iredell is interested in knowing from the staffing survey how MRS counties compare to non-MRS counties with regards to staff retention/turnover.

Suggestions for agenda items for future meetings

- Coding/finances
- How to deal with the need for flexible time
- Repeat Maltreatment